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NEWS

Winchester delegation 2024 agenda includes new projects, commuter rail station

NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY | STAFF WRITER

January 22, 2024 . 7:28 PM — 5 min read

Construction on the inbound side at Winchester Center station in December 2023. COURTESY PHOTO/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

It's a new year and a new legislative session. Winchester's delega
excited by what that will mean for the community, including mo

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funding, new projects and the grand opening of the long-awaited Winchester Commuter Rail Station.

Sen. Jason Lewis is one of the people looking forward to a ribbon cutting later this year. He has been working on the project since 2008 when he was a representative.

“It’s been a long and winding road to finally get where we are,” Lewis said. “Winchester will finally have a new, modern, fully accessible commuter rail station.”

The project, which has been ongoing since 2010, cost more than $50 million and was funded by state and federal funds. The station was originally built in the 1950s and was in very poor condition.

Lewis said there will be a partial opening of the station in the spring, with the full ribbon cutting later in the year. When asked if this was a victory, he laughed.

“It’s going to be when we cut the ribbon,” he said. “It’s going to be great to see the final conclusion for not just me, but for so many people who have been working on this for years.”

Also on his Winchester agenda is the Lynch School. Lewis is looking forward to bringing in $5 million to the town from the supplemental fiscal year 2024 budget for the Lynch project.

“Next up is the Muraco School,” he said. “We are committed, as a delegation, to getting into that process.”

Money, money, money

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For Rep. Michael Day, 2024 might be a challenging year budget wise, as compared with last year when both Winchester and Stoneham did quite well.

Day said this year, Winchester will receive at least $10 million in Chapter 70 funding, up 3% from the last fiscal year. Chapter 70 refers to funding for education.

Day added Winchester is also expected to receive $2 million in local aid, an additional 3% increase.

Day is also working to find funding to increase mental health programs. One, he said, is called the NAN Project, which works on a peer level in high and middle schools, discussing mental health.

“Winchester was one of the earliest to adopt this program,” Day said. “It’s a frank discussion about mental health. It’s an area I’m excited about because I’m working to improve the safety net so people can get the help they need.”

Day said he recently sat in on an eighth-grade class.

“It was honest and very moving to me,” he said of the experience. “Just to see the kids open up…it was incredible to me.”

With $200,000 earmarked for the NAN Project statewide, Day said his goal is to find more money for the program.

Middlesex Fells project

Lewis, along with Rep. Paul J. Donato, D-Medford, founded the Middlesex Fells Legislative Caucus, pulling in legislators from communities surrounding the Middlesex Fells Reservation. The group has worked with

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the Department of Conservation and Recreation as well as the Friends of the Fells to enhance and preserve the area.

“We want to improve safety so all users feel comfortable using the Fells,” Lewis said. “State funding enabled the Friends of the Fells to launch a new PR campaign called ‘Be Kind.’”

The campaign, Lewis said, will be implemented by the DCR and hopefully create a culture of respect.

He said there have been problems in the past with people not following the rules, such as staying on trails and keeping dogs leashed except in the Sheepfold, the only place that allows dogs off leash.

“We just want everyone to be more mindful,” Lewis said. “People need to be respectful of each other and nature.”

Lewis said the $200,000 earmark will enable the Be Kind campaign to roll out statewide.

Statewide programs

While state legislators are always keeping a close eye on how to benefit their particular districts, they’re also responsible for making things better statewide. As such, Winchester’s delegation has been hard at work on everything from elder affairs to firearms legislation to improving education.

Sen. Patricia Jehlen said she mostly follows Lewis’s lead when it comes to Winchester. But in the Senate, she’s been leading the charge in elder affairs and labor issues.

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Lately, her attention has been on a bill that will reform nursing homes and provide more accountability. Two other bills will focus on healthcare finance, such as providing improved nursing in assisted living facilities and having home care agencies licensed.

In labor, Jehlen said she wants to address the labor wage gap.

“I’d like to see minimum wage increased,” she said, adding inflation didn’t stop while raises did.

Day said he’s been working on firearms legislation and recently saw a bill to significantly modernize firearms laws pass the House with 120 yes votes out of 160.

“That was a robust message to improve firearms laws,” he said. “We want to make our streets safer.”

The 120-page bill looks at improving licensing, with requirements to take live firearms training as part of the process. He said ghost guns have been redefined so that disassembled parts will now count as weapons and those in possession can be charged.

“It will stop allowing people to evade the law and be held accountable,” Day said.

He added the state has also helped unlock federal funds for violence prevention, putting money towards after school and intervention programs.

Day is also looking at a fairly substantial climate bill that includes a proposal of his that would require producers of multiple packaging to pay for all that extra trash that’s not recyclable. Think of receiving a

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with a tiny item inside. Day said the idea is to put pressure on manufacturers to make that packaging recyclable and therefore, pay less.

Lewis, along with Jehlen, are eyeing housing affordability.

“Housing is so astronomically expensive,” Lewis said. “It’s a threat to the vitality of the Boston region.”

For example, Lewis pointed to college students. He said when they graduate, they may find jobs in the area, but where will they live with housing in short supply and incredibly expensive?

“We’re looking at different options for housing and at different price points,” he said. “We’re looking at a major bond bill in the coming months.”

And Lewis, as the Senate chairman of the education committee, said there’s plenty of education bills in the pipeline. And there’s money coming in from other laws, such as the Student Opportunity Act, that are now being funded.

In 2019, the Student Opportunity Act was signed by then Gov. Charlie Baker to improve the equity of education funding across the state.

Helping lead the effort, Lewis said the Legislature is halfway through the six-year implementation, which made changes to the Chapter 70 funding formula.

He said there are also efforts to address expenses in early childhood and childcare. The Senate will debate the issue in the spring.

Additionally, the Fair Share Amendment, which placed a 4% surtax on income over $1 million, was voted in by residents in 2022. The sc

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"Millionaire's Tax" is now seeing revenue come in that is earmarked specifically for education and transportation needs.

Lewis said not only will it help make college more affordable for students, but the Legislature is hoping to make two-year community college free for in-state students.

All the legislators agreed 2024 will be a busy session at the State House.

"I'm hoping to see this end by getting it to the governor's desk," Day said, of one of his bills. "It's a busy time for everyone."

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Public safety data How Winchester compares on firearms licenses in comparable Massachusetts communities Active licenses as of Jan. 25, 2025 — Source: Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board License to carry firearms Firearms identification card Winchester and Marblehead are the focus communities. Peers selected based on comparable population size, demographics and suburban

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By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester

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Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents 'Syldason: You Are Welcome Here'

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On

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High School presents “Chicago: Teen Edition,” a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. This iconic production is set in the 1920s. Performances will take place on March 13 and 14

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Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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